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The Capture of the U. S. Steamer "Water Witch" in Ossabaw Sound, Ga., June 2-3, 1864

By THE EDITOR

In the latter part of May, 1864, an expedition was planned and suggested to the Confederate authorities at the head of the forces defending the City of Savannah and the neighboring territory which, for boldness in its design and the completeness of its arrangement, insuring its success, has seldom been surpassed and not frequently equalled. While it is true that many like performances have been proposed, they have not often been adopted, because of a lack of faith in their success. The incident referred to was remarkable for the secrecy with which it was designed and carried out, as well as the absolute obedience to orders in their most minute detail on the part of every one in whom the confidence of the leader was imposed. The event to which we allude is the seizing of the United States blockading steamer "Water Witch" in Ossabaw Sound, Georgia, beginning late in the night of the second of June, 1864, and ending successfully in the early morning of the third. It is true that the expedition was successful in the accomplishment of the object aimed at by its leader, Lieutenant Commander Thomas P. Pelot, but it was at the cost of the life of that gallant and brave officer. Let us get at some facts in the life of the man and see how he obtained his experience in the duties of a naval officer.

Born in South Carolina, and appointed from that state to the old United States Navy, young Pelot resigned on the eleventh of January, 1861, to take part in the impending conflict between the states, choosing rather to serve his beloved Southland than to fight against her interests, even though the prospects for rapid promotion in the latter cause seemed certain. He was commissioned as first lieutenant in the Confederate States Navy March 26, 1861, and another commission as first lieutenant was given him, dated October 23, 1862, to rank from the second of that month.

On the nineteenth of May, 1862, Mr. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy of the Confederate States, issued an order to Flag Officer Josiah Tattnall, then commanding the naval defenses of Richmond and vicinity, to proceed to Savannah, Ga., and resume the command of the naval defenses of the State of Georgia, and on the sixteenth of September, of the same year, Commodore Tattnall, by order from the Secretary of the Navy, instructed Lieutenant-Commanding Thomas P. Pelot to take command of the Confederate steamer *Savannah*. In less than a month from the latter date, that is to say on October 9th, Lieutenant Pelot was ordered by the Commodore to "proceed with the steamer *Savannah*, under your command, to the anchorage between Forts Jackson and Cheves, and be ready at all times to man the naval battery (Fort Cheves) with the crew of the *Savannah*". Then, on the third of November, the lieutenant, while on duty off Fort Jackson, was served with the commodore's command to "sweep the place in the river where the fire rafts were placed with your small boats until you recover the anchors and chains which were used to moor those rafts." (Naval War Records, Series 1, vol. 13, pp. 806, 807, 812, 815).

About six months after the last mentioned order, on the twenty-first of May, 1863, Lieutenant Pelot was in command of another steamer, as shown by an order from W. A. Webb, "Commanding afloat, on board C. S. S. *Atlanta*, Savannah river," to "proceed to city with the steamer *Oconee* and make all dispatch in repairing the smokestack. You will also render all assistance to Lieutenant (C. Lucian) Jones in fitting out the C. S. S. *Savannah*." Just a week after Commander Webb ordered Lieutenant Pelot "to place coal with dispatch on board the *Oconee* and on Saturday next you will proceed with the *Oconee* to the obstructions and report to me." (Naval War Records, series 1, vol. 14, pp. 698-703.)

Nearly three weeks later, on the eighth of June, W. A. Webb, then "Commanding Naval Squadron on C. S. S. *Atlanta*, off Thunderbolt," reported to Secretary Mallory that Commodore Tattnall had shown him a dispatch from the Secretary

of the Navy, relating to the plan of using the steamer *Oconee* for important service to the government, and that he (Webb) had that day transferred her, with the two engineers, to his (Tattnall's) command. (Naval War Records, Series 1, vol. 14, p. 709.)

The next day Commander Webb issued an order to Lieutenant Pelot, C. S. Navy, commanding the C. S. S. *Oconee*, off Thunderbolt, to proceed to Savannah and "Report to Flag Officer Tattnall, and inform him that you are ordered to turn over to him the steamer *Oconee* and the officers and crew, with the exception of yourself and Assistant Surgeon (Theodosius B.) Ford and Midshipman (Wm. D.) Goode, and the men and boys who remain after the crew of the *Savannah* are selected. After you have delivered the officers and crew of the steamer to Commodore Tattnall, you will return with the remainder and take charge of the steamer *Resolute* lying off Thunderbolt." (Naval War Records, Series 1, vol. 14, pp. 709-710.)

We next find Lieutenant Pelot mentioned as commanding a vessel of peculiar construction, built at Savannah with the expectation that she would be a most formidable war machine, almost indestructible, and capable of doing great damage to war vessels of the enemy. The mistake in her construction is pointed out in the report which will now be quoted. On the thirtieth of June, 1863, Commodore William Wallace Hunter was flag officer at Savannah, and his flagship was the steamer *Savannah*, from which he that day reported to the Secretary of the Navy regarding the several vessels assigned to his command, from which this paragraph is taken: "The *Georgia*, ironclad floating battery (nine guns), Lieutenant-Commanding T. P. Pelot, contributes the chief naval defense at the obstructions below the city, and is moored near them. Her steam power is scarcely adequate to propel her at the slowest rate. Her battery is in serviceable condition, and the crew well drilled at her battery, and are in good discipline." Two days after this Commodore Hunter, reporting to Secretary Mallory, mentioned the fact that Pelot was a young lieutenant, and suggested that he "may be more appropriately

placed elsewhere." (Naval War Records, Series I, vol. 14, pp. 714, 717.) His further work will now engage our attention.

In the closing days of the month of May, 1864, it was whispered among a circle of officers and men, to a certain degree in touch with the heads of the army and navy on duty in Savannah, that preparations were in progress looking to an attack by night, in the near future, on the vessels composing the blockading squadron on the coast. In this small number of persons not actually of the consulting body were a few members of the Signal Corps who, by reason of the knowledge gained through the transmission at their hands of telegrams, both by flag signals and by telegraph, had information which they were forbidden to mention. Among them was the present writer, who just then was one of the two telegraph operators, from the Signal Corps, on duty at the headquarters of General Lafayette McLaws, in Oglethorpe Barracks, where the DeSoto hotel now stands. The other operator was Mr. Henry M. Stoddard. It was pretty well fixed in the minds of those who could in any way communicate with each other on the subject, that the time for action on the part of those selected for the service was actually at hand on the last day of the month, and the feeling of anxiety was intense. Who suggested the plan is not known; but it is quite positive that Lieut. Pelot was, from the first, designated as the leader of the attacking party. At that time Commodore William Wallace Hunter had assumed command of the small navy of the Confederacy in the vicinity of Savannah, and he organized the expedition, placing Lieutenant Joseph Price second in charge under Pelot. There were seven boats, manned by fifteen officers and one hundred and seventeen men.

At that period the Confederate iron-clad *Georgia* was moored in the river near Fort Jackson. She was a vessel built with money contributed by the ladies of Savannah, intended as a ram, and covered with railroad iron. Her builder was Henry F. Willink, Jr., an experienced ship-builder of Savannah, and she was a formidable engine of war in the form of a stationary battery; but unfortunately, as already shown,

she was so heavy that the engines placed in her could not give her the power to move through the water except at a very slow rate. Because of the manner through which she was constructed she was at first known as "The Ladies' Gunboat", but her name was changed to *Georgia*. The point from which the expedition was to start was the mooring of the *Georgia*, and the time of starting the afternoon of the 31st of May. The boats were towed to the Isle of Hope battery, whence they rowed to the battery at Beaulieu, where they remained that night.

It was probably not known at the beginning just which one of the vessels composing the blockading squadron would be attacked, but scouts sent out reported that one of them was at anchor in Little Ogeechee river, close under Racoon Key, and she was selected for the fight. She proved to be the *Water Witch*. Before we proceed with an account of the attack, let us learn something of the history of this boat.

The date of her building is not known to this writer, and the first time of any service she performed, so far as he can ascertain, was, according to J. Thomas Scharf, in his "History of the Confederate States Navy", page 645, where he mentions her as a fine side-wheel steamer, a favorite ship of the navy, mounting four guns, adding that she was used in the Paraguay War of 1855. Scharf also makes note of the fact that the service of the *Water Witch* as a blockade runner was enhanced by her "speed and handiness". Commander A. T. Mahan, the writer of a small volume in a series of books on "The Navy in the Civil War", said volume bearing the title "The Gulf and Inland Waters", after mentioning the fact that the *Water Witch*, before her transfer to the Georgia coast, was stationed in the Mississippi district, described her as "A small side-wheel steamer of under four hundred tons, with three light guns, then commanded by Lieutenant Francis Winslow". In the "Naval War Records", series 1, vol. 17, pp. 14-16, we find reports showing that she was, from December 25 to 27, 1861, in service in Mobile Bay, when she was commanded by Lieutenant-Commanding A. K. Hughes; and the same volume, page

34, shows that on the last day of that month she was on duty still in the Mississippi Sound. Again, in the same volume, page 183, a report from Lieutenant Hughes, dated "at sea", March 6, 1862, addressed to Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, stated that, with the *Water Witch* he had captured, on the 5th instant, off St. Andrew's Bay, the schooner *William Mallory*, as a prize. We find, in the same volume, page 200, a report from Flag-officer Wm. W. McKean, commanding Eastern Gulf Squadron, to Secretary Welles that he had dispatched the *Water Witch* to Philadelphia, "with instructions to Lieutenant-Commanding Hughes to report to the Secretary of the Navy immediately".

The next item, taken from volume 13, is a little more definite. On page 355 information is given that on the 3d of October, 1862, Commander Charles Steedman, then stationed in the St. John's river, reported to Rear Admiral DuPont that the *Water Witch* and two other boats had been sent up the river "to feel the batteries at St. John's Bluff, the enemy having been busily engaged several days on some work in and around the old battery". The report showed that "the enemy" promptly responded to the firing of the boats "with great accuracy as to the range"; and shortly after he "had the result hoisted", and the vessels returned out of the range of the enemy. More than three months afterward, January 24, 1863, Rear Admiral DuPont reported from Port Royal, South Carolina, to Secretary Welles that "The steamer *Water Witch* met with a serious accident whereby her upper cylinder head has been rendered useless". (Naval War Records, series 1, vol. 13, p. 535); then, on the 8th of February, Austin Pendergrast, who had been placed in command of the steamer, wrote from New York harbor to the Secretary of the Navy as follows: "In obedience to an order from Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, I have the honor to report the arrival of the U. S. S. *Water Witch* at this port". (Same vol., p. 649.) It took some time to make the necessary repairs, and it was not until the 14th of June that Admiral DuPont, at Port Royal, informed the Secretary of the Navy, at Washington, of "the arrival here of the

U. S. S. *Water Witch*, Lieutenant-Commander A. Pendergrast”.

We now come to the point where the steam vessel whose name has so frequently been mentioned reached the locality of the scene to which the foregoing statements are but the introduction, and where her operations as an instrument of warfare ended with her capture and with disaster to her crew. A number of attacks had been made by the monitors and other vessels of the blockading fleet on Fort McAllister, Beaulieu Battery, and other points occupied by the Confederates; and it was decided at headquarters in Savannah that an attack should be made on the squadron, with the hope that at least one of the vessels could be taken, or destroyed, and the enemy thereby weakened in no inconsiderable degree. The plan suggested and agreed upon was to send a boat expedition down the Vernon river in the darkness of the night, the boats to be allowed to drift with the falling tide, so as to avoid the noise of oars in rowing as far as possible, and the men composing the attacking party were well chosen and thoroughly drilled as to any emergency that might arise. The name of the person from whom the proposition first came will in all probability remain a secret forever. The detail for the expedition was made by Commodore William Wallace Hunter, and the information concerning the boats and their crews has already been given. Scouts had reported that one of the vessels composing the blockaders, which proved to be the *Water Witch*, was usually anchored in a solitary position, and she was singled out for the attack.

Early in the morning of the 3d of June, the news began to spread throughout the City of Savannah that an expedition, planned by the Confederate Navy officials, had, during the night just closed, made a strong effort to capture one of the ships of war then blockading the Georgia coast; that the attack had been stoutly resisted; and that not only the boat containing the leader of the attacking party but all the others, save one, had been taken by the enemy with the loss of the life of our leader and others. The news came from the crew

of the escaped boat who believed all that they had reported. Sad countenances were to be seen everywhere, and no doubt of the truth of the report was felt by any one. But later in the day the people heard a different tale, and sad countenances gave way to expressions of joy, and words of congratulation were exchanged on all sides. As the truth became known all rejoiced over the gallant and successful conduct of that portion of the little band of Confederates who stood manfully at the post of duty, gaining a victory of which they had reason to be proud, little dreaming that a few had turned back in the belief that all had been lost. Mingled with the rejoicing, however, was a feeling of grief that some had met death in the hour of victory, and that the brave leader himself had paid with his useful life for the glory which he himself so nobly helped to win, but in the celebration of which he could take no part.

And here, with the reader's permission, the writer will change the form of the narrative from the third to the first person. I had been among the first to be detailed from the headquarters of the Signal Corps to the camp of instruction in telegraphy, and early learned to read messages by sound. I was then attached to the headquarters of General Lafayette McLaws, as before said, but that day I was off duty. I strolled into the office of the Corps, at the foot of Lincoln Street, on the Bay, to get some sort of supplies for my office and was conversing with some of my comrades, when, suddenly, the call for the Savannah office sounded from the Beaulieu station, coupled with the startling words "*Very Important*". We were all (several being present) much agitated, and the officer in charge, nodding to me, said "Take it down!" I did not hesitate, and, calling to a brother member to write, I received and called out to him the following:

"Beaulieu, June 3, 1864.

"To Flag Officer W. W. Hunter,
Savannah, Ga.

"At 8 o'clock p. m., the expedition got under way and formed two columns. Boats Nos. 1, 3, 5, and 7, composing

the port column, 2, 4, and 6, the starboard column; Lieut. Thomas P. Pelot, commanding, with Assistant Engineer Caldwell, C. S. N., and Moses Dallas (colored) pilot, led in boat 1; Lieut. Price, with Master's Mate Gray and Second Assistant Engineer Fabian, in No. 2; Midshipman Minor, with Master's Mate Freeman, in boat No. 3; Midshipman Trimble, in boat No. 4; Boatswain Seymour, with Master's Mate Barclay, in boat No. 5; Master's Mate H. Golder, with Assistant Surgeon Thomas, in boat No. 6; Master's Mate Rostler, with Assistant Surgeon Jones, in boat No. 7; and proceeded with muffled oars to the spot where we supposed the enemy's vessel to be. On arriving, we found that she had either shifted her anchorage or that we had been mistaken as to her position. After searching in vain till nearly daylight, Lieut. Pelot ordered Boatswain Seymour, with one man, to remain on Racoon Keys as scouts, and the expedition to return to camp at Beaulieu Battery.

"On the next day (June 2), at 9 o'clock p. m., we got under way and proceeded to Racoon Keys, where we took on board our scouts, who reported that one of the enemy's vessels was lying in Ossabaw Sound, about three miles from where we were. After waiting there until midnight we were ordered to get under way and pull cautiously. The night being dark and rainy we got close aboard of her without being discovered. On being hailed, Lieut. Pelot answered we were 'rebels' and gave the order to 'board her'. The vessel having steam up at the time, as soon as the alarm was given, commenced turning her wheels backwards and forwards rapidly, thus thwarting the earnest efforts of Boatswain Seymour and Master's Mate Rostler to get on board with the entire boat's crew.

"The port column, led by Lieut. Pelot, boarded on the port side; the starboard column, led by Lieut. Price, boarded on the starboard side. In coming alongside, the enemy's fire with small arms was quite severe; in fact it was during that time, and while the boarding netting, which was triced up, was being cut through, that the most of our loss in killed and wounded was sustained. After a sharp hand-to-hand fight of some ten

minutes, the ship was taken. Lieut. Pelot was the first to gain the deck, and while bravely fighting was shot and instantly killed. In his death the country has lost a brave and gallant officer, and society one of her highest ornaments.

"The command then devolved upon me, and I proceeded forthwith to extricate the vessel from the position she was then in to avoid recapture by the enemy. Our pilot having been killed before the boats reached the side of the ship, I sought for the enemy's pilot and found that he was too badly wounded to assist me, but finally procured one of the quartermasters, whom I compelled to pilot me to the upper end of Racoon Key, where, at the top of high water, the ship grounded. I then found it necessary to lighten her, which I did by throwing overboard some barrels of beef and pork, a few coils of hemp rigging, the remainder of the chain, which I had slipped as soon as we took the vessel, and lowering two of the guns in the boats. On getting ashore I immediately landed the killed, wounded and prisoners at Beaulieu Battery. At 4 o'clock p. m., having in the meantime obtained a pilot from the shore, I succeeded in getting off and anchored her at 7 o'clock p. m., under the guns of Beaulieu Battery above the obstructions when Lieut. W. W. Carnes, C. S. N., by your order, arrived on board and assumed command.

"In the darkness and confusion on board it was impossible for me to observe each and every man; but I will state, with pride, every one, officers and men, did their duty most gallantly. I would state, however, that I owe my life to E. D. Davis, ordinary seaman of the C. S. steamer *Savannah*, he having cut down every opponent when I was sorely pressed by them.

"Boatswain's Mate J. Perry, of the steamer *Sampson*, rendered me most valuable assistance in lightening the vessel and general duties on board. The former, although severely wounded, remained on deck as long as he could."

The report was signed by Lieutenant Joseph Price.

The night was dark and stormy, and while the conflict was raging flashes of lightning occasionally enabled the fighters to

determine how to act. Two of the officers of the *Water Witch*, Commander Pendergrast and Master Charles W. Buck, in their reports charged the officer of the deck, E. D. Parsons, with taking refuge below deck. It has been stated that the two commanders, Pelot and Pendergrast, came face to face and actually crossed swords. As seen by officer Price's report, the death of Pelot did not cause any confusion, or bring about any hitch in the plans previously mapped out, so completely were they prepared. The Federal reports commended the Confederates on the manner in which the affair was planned and carried out. The casualties on the Confederate side were: Lieut. Thomas P. Pelot, Gunner Pat Lotin, Seamen W. R. Jones, James Stapleton, ——— Crosby and Pilot Moses Dallas. Wounded: Lieutenant Joseph Price, Midshipman Minor, Boat-swain ——— Seymour, Surgeon's Steward ——— Harley, and Seamen J. R. Rice, J. Barrett, A. McDonald, E. J. Murphy, A. Williams, T. King, and ——— Champion. The Federals lost two killed and twelve were wounded.

A most interesting incident in connection with this matter is the part borne by the colored man, Moses Dallas. He was a pilot, skilled in his business, and held in the highest esteem by all who were connected with the little naval force stationed about Savannah. That he was reliable and well thought of is shown by the following extract from a letter written June 5, 1863, by Commander John K. Mitchell to officer W. A. Webb, in which, after authorizing the placing of Pilot James Fleetwood on the same footing as other pilots employed by Webb, he added: "Your action in increasing the pay of Moses Dallas, colored pilot, from \$80.00 to \$100.00 is hereby approved".

General Sam Jones, on the 4th of June, telegraphed from Charleston to General S. Cooper, at Richmond, "Night before last the U. S. gunboat *Water Witch*, of four guns, was captured, after a sharp fight, in Ossabaw Sound, by a naval party, organized by Commodore Hunter". (Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, series 1, vol. 35, part 1, p. 404.) In the second part of the volume just quoted, page 116,

will be found a letter from Brig. Gen. Jno. P. Hatch, at Hilton Head, June 7, to Asst. Adjt. Gen'l W. L. M. Burgen, Washington, containing this request: "Will you please call the attention of the General Commanding to the necessity of an increased naval force in Calibogue Sound, since the capture by the rebels of the *Water Witch*?" The appendix to the Annual Report of Secretary of the Navy Welles for 1864, dated December 5th, contains the reports of all the U. S. officials who were required to make them on this subject. Rear Admiral J. A. Dahlgren made two reports, Lieutenant-Commander Austin Pendergrast, of the *Water Witch*, two (one written from Savannah while he was a prisoner, by courtesy of the Confederate authorities), Acting Masters Lewis West and Chas. W. Buck, Lieutenant-Commander E. E. Stone, Acting Assistant Surgeon W. H. Pierson, and Volunteer Lieutenant Wm. W. Kennington, two. The first of these is so interesting as coming from the enemy's side that it is here given in full:

From the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XXXV, Part II, Pages 137-138.

Flag Steamer *Philadelphia*,
Off Morris Island, S. C., June 17, 1864.

Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster,
Commanding Department of the South:

General: My attention has been drawn to the inclosed article, purporting to have been written by a correspondent in Hilton Head. It is asserted therein that the only person who escaped from the *Water Witch* gives information that not a shot was fired in defense. Now, the fact is that the person alluded to makes no such statement, but just the reverse. He says that there was hard fighting for half an hour, and that he noticed the captain (Pendergrast) three times on the quarter-deck encouraging his men, who were fighting briskly. He also says that the rebels came in on all sides. It was also known that the Savannah papers admitted a loss of 7 men killed and

12 wounded. The same article is equally wide of the truth in stating that the *Water Witch* was 1,300 tons and carried three 100-pounders and three 12-pounders, and was one of the fleetest and most valuable vessels for blockade in the squadron. The *Water Witch* was a small steamer of 378 tons and carried only one 30-pounder and three 12 pounders, such as are used in boats. Her full crew only amounted to 82 men, and of this small number she was 14 men short when taken, which would not have been the case if the quota of men expected from the troops of this department had been supplied; whereas not a man was received until you took command, and now only 50 to this date, which will not begin to fill deficiencies. She was a convenient vessel on account of her draught, being less than 10 feet, but it is absurd to speak of her as a fast or valuable vessel. She was of moderate speed, probably not nine knots, and was only of account in comparison with other vessels that have no steam. Her trifling armament and number of men gave her little importance.

Whatever want of vigilance may have existed, all the information we have goes to show that it was redeemed by a sharp resistance against superior numbers. The official rebel report which has reached here states that the fighting was hard.

I hope that the writer of the notice may be called to account for these statements. They are untrue and unjust to the character of the commander, officers and crew of the *Water Witch*, who, being prisoners, are unable to say anything in their own behalf; coming, too, from persons within the military jurisdiction, they so far receive sanction as to endanger ill-feelings between the two services.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. A. DAHLGREN, *Rear-Admiral*.

Comdg. South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

It seems proper to state here that "the only person who escaped from the *Water Witch*", referred to in the foregoing, was a "contraband" named Peter McIntosh.

It is strange that Admiral Dahlgren, while, like all the other interested persons so sorely felt the loss of the little steamer, after her capture changed his estimate of her value and speed. Before her loss to the United States there seems to have been no doubt that she was a favorite because of her "speed and handiness". That her loss was considered a great misfortune may be gathered from the many references to her by all of the writers, but it is brought out with stronger emphasis in the following instructions contained in an order from Acting Rear Admiral S. P. Lee, June 23, 1864, to Lieutenant-Commander Babcock, regarding operations in the Pamunkey river: "Be vigilant at all times against surprise from the enemy's boats. The recent capture of the *Water Witch*, which had the usual boarding nettings up, impresses the necessity of having wire nettings and wire ridge ropes for them, as used in the Potomac Flotilla, and these you are authorized to require for your permanent vessels. Single vessels are very subject to assault". (Naval War Records, series 1, vol. 10, p. 198.)

Commodore Daniel Ammen, in his book, "The Atlantic Coast" (page 149), forming the 2d volume of the series on "The Navy in the Civil War," thus writes of this incident:

"On June 3, 1864, the *Water Witch*, Commander Pendergrast, blockading in Ossabaw Sound, was boarded and captured, only one man (a "contraband") escaping. Seven cotton barges, carrying 150 men, approached the vessel, the night being dark and squally; they were, in fact, alongside almost as soon as discovered, and although boarding nettings were up, the vessel soon became a prize. The *Water Witch* lost 1 man killed, 13 wounded, and 2 missing. The Confederates lost their leader, Lieutenant Pelot of their navy, 8 or 10 killed, and 15 or 20 wounded".

We will now leave off any further accounts of the capture of the vessel. The reports are nearly all alike, with minor variations, none of them of sufficient importance to repeat. We have given the facts at hand in regard to the career of Lieutenant Pelot. It is proper, then, to close this article with extracts from writers who can furnish information in relation to the experience during his connection with the U. S. Navy of Commander Austin Pendergrast.

The *Water Witch* was commanded by Austin Pendergrast, who, at the time of her capture, as we have seen (as we learn from a book compiled by Lewis R. Hammersly, of the U. S. Marine Corps, and published by J. B. Lippincott & Co., of Philadelphia, in 1870, giving "The Records of Living Officers of the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps; with a History of Naval Operations During the Rebellion of 1861-5"), was appointed to the U. S. Naval Academy from Kentucky. Before entering, he was attached to razee *Independence*, of the Mediterranean squadron, then to the frigate *Columbia*, of the home squadron, and his term in the Academy began in 1854, and, as passed midshipman, he was transferred to the Coast Survey the same year. Promoted from time to time, he held a position on the frigate *Congress* at the time she was sunk by the Confederate ram *Merrimac*, taking command when, during the engagement, Lieut. Joseph Smith was killed. He was commissioned as lieutenant-commander July 16, 1862, and commanded the *Water Witch*, of the South Atlantic blockading squadron, from that time until she was captured by a party of Confederates, led by Lieut. Thomas P. Pelot, in Ossabaw Sound, on the night of June 2, 1864. The author from whom the facts just given are taken falsely states that the Confederate attacking party was "a large body of rebels".

As to the part taken by Lieutenant Pendergrast in the sinking of the frigate *Congress* by the Confederate ram *Merrimac*, referred to in the preceding paragraph, we give the following extracts from "Recollections of a Naval Officer" by Captain W. H. Parker, of the Confederate States Navy, who commanded the *Beaufort* at that time. Before quoting from

Parker, however, let us make this statement: After the death of Lieutenant Joseph Smith, of the *Congress*, and her colors were struck, Lieutenant Parker was ordered to the ship to receive her surrender, and of this incident President Jefferson Davis, in his "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government", vol. II, page 198, says: "The flag of the ship and the sword of its then commander were delivered to Lieutenant Parker, by whom they were subsequently sent to the Navy Department at Richmond". The words of Parker now follow:

"At midnight the *Congress* blew up. According to the report of Lieutenant Pendergrast she had been on fire from the beginning of the action; and Medical Director Shippen, who from his station would be likely to know, says: 'We were on fire in the sick bay, in the main hold, and under the ward room near the after magazine. Some of these fires were extinguished, but the most dangerous one, that near the after magazine, was never extinguished, and was the cause of the explosion, which, during the following night, blew the ship to pieces'". ("Recollections of a Naval Officer", p. 259.)

Again, we have this statement by Parker:

"Upon my reporting the facts in relation to Captain Smith and Lieutenant Pendergrast a question was raised as to whether they were not prisoners on parole. Questions of the kind were crudely treated by our Navy Department. The Secretary himself was ignorant of naval laws, customs and precedents; and his immediate advisers were in the same category. The older officers who had served in the war of 1812, and whose experience gave them a knowledge of such matters, were not consulted by him. Those about the Secretary were men who had not seen much service in war. It was held that Smith and Pendergrast had escaped, and should either deliver themselves up or refuse to serve until regularly exchanged, I, on the contrary, insisted that they were not bound to do so. They had been prisoners, it is true—so had every officer and man of the *Congress* been; but I left them, and after the *Beaufort* left the side of the *Congress* they had no opportunity of getting back to her and they escaped to the

shore as the others did. The officers and men of the Confederate man-of-war *Alabama* escaped, after her capture by the U. S. S. ship *Kearsarge*, under precisely the same circumstances—the enemy failed to take possession of them.

“Some time after, when Pendergrast was unfortunate enough to be captured in the *Water Witch*, a question was raised in Savannah, where he had been taken, as to his conduct in reference to the *Congress* affair. I immediately wrote to Commodore Tattnall, commanding the station, completely exonerating him from any unofficerlike or improper conduct on that occasion.

“I justified his action in every particular. Commodore Barron was a prisoner at the time, and if I had held Captain Smith could have been exchanged for him; but as I have said, I did not know it was Captain Smith; not expecting to see a senior officer to the lieutenant, who said he commanded the ship. No one regretted more than I did that the result could not have been different; but I should have permitted him to return to the *Congress*, under the circumstances, if he had combined in himself the entire Smith family”. (“Recollections of a Naval Officer”, pp. 269-270).

The *Water Witch* was, as Scharf says, “enrolled in the Confederate naval force,” but her loss to the enemy was one of those incidents which caused more than ordinary bitterness, and, for fear that she might at some time slip out and do some damage to her former owners, great care was taken to have a close watch set upon her, and she was never able to evade the vigilance of the blockaders, and she was consequently of no service to her captors. She was destroyed at the time Sherman took possession of Savannah. Pendergrast was tried by court-martial, found guilty of culpable inefficiency in the discharge of duty, in not taking necessary precautions to save the vessel from a surprise attack, and suffered the penalty recommended in his case by the court trying him.